

TRINCHERA RANCH

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September 21, 2009

Via email (dennis.rankin@wdc.usda.gov) and US Mail

Dennis Rankin
Environmental Protection Specialist
USDA Rural Utilities Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Stop 1571
Washington, DC 20250-1571

Re: Tri-State San Luis Valley/Calumet/Comanche Transmission Project

Dear Mr. Rankin:

As a dedicated second-generation San Luis Valley rancher, a businessman and a life-long member of the San Luis Valley community, I am writing to discuss the proposed San Luis Valley/Calumet/Comanche Transmission Project and its potential impact on the ranch that is so much a part of the life of my family, the Ranch's employees and their families and the community in which we live.

As a rancher and farmer in this community, I understand and agree with the need to ensure the transfer of reliable power to the San Luis Valley. I also applaud proposed solar-power initiatives with their aim of producing clean energy in the Valley. However, I also have serious concerns with the way in which the transmission line project process has occurred.

I live in a community where we work together to achieve our goals and we talk through our disagreements. We may not agree at the end of the day, but all of our voices are heard. Therefore, I believe this project must be approached in an inclusive manner, where we are engaged as a community and where the community's concerns are fully considered and addressed. We can achieve this by taking the time to discuss all alternatives which will allow all San Luis Valley residents to fully evaluate and provide informed input into a decision that will impact their community forever.

B-008-001 I am very concerned about the impact of the line on Trinchera Ranch and the community.

B-008-002 Trinchera Ranch is not just a piece of property, but is part of the economic, historical and environmental fabric of our community and significant to the Valley as a whole. Regardless of the exact route chosen along the utilities' preferred alternative, a transmission line will seriously impact the natural habitats of the deer, elk and other wildlife species that call the Ranch home.

B-008-001: Environmental Consequences (In Review)

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted. Potential environmental consequences and mitigation measures from the proposed project will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in late 2010 and will be available at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

B-008-002: Wildlife (In Review)

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted. Potential impacts to wildlife from the proposed project and mitigation measures will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in late 2010 and will be available at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

B-008-003

Currently, no transmission lines exist on the Ranch or even along Highway 160. A drastic change such as this – particularly in undisturbed natural habitat – could have dramatic and devastating impacts, and not just to wildlife. The Ranch also serves as the watershed for our community—the watershed that towns, farmers and everyone in this part of the Valley relies on.

B-008-004

Trinchera Ranch still remains an operating ranch with primary focus on hunting and fishing, and, therefore, a business. In fact, I am proud to say that Trinchera Ranch is one of Costilla County's largest employers with thirty full-time employees most of who live in the County. There are multiple generations of families working on this ranch. Many of our employees are the second-generation in their family to work at Trinchera. We even have some third-generation employees. You see, our employees are more than just workers; half of our employees have been with us for more than twenty years and more than three-fourths of them have worked on the Ranch for more than a decade.

However, we are quite fearful about the future of our family and our community if the Ranch suffers due to changes brought by the proposed project. Trinchera Ranch is a community within a community where we all look out for each other. Our community involvement transcends from the employees to the Ranch itself. We donate funds to the local school districts, the fire department, local governments and more. Colorado teachers learn about the watershed management and ongoing habitat/stream improvements on the Ranch while local nonprofits benefit from the sale of firewood gathered on the Ranch. From providing scholarships to Costilla County students to funding the San Luis Mariachi Band or paying for Costilla County's fire insurance, we are deeply dedicated to and involved in the community.

Trinchera Ranch is just as intimately connected with and committed to the Valley's habitat and wildlife. We have worked closely with the Colorado Division of Wildlife (DOW) and other organizations for many years on initiatives to improve or sustain habitat and wildlife. In fact, Trinchera Ranch is the birthplace for the Ranching for Wildlife program, which due to its success is now used on other private lands across the State and Nation. We also continue to work with DOW on stream improvements to maintain habitat for the Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. We make improvements to the Ranch's stream habitat so they can be used as population centers for the DOW in its effort to stock the Rio Grande Cutthroat throughout the San Luis Valley. Furthermore, we are working with DOW to reintroduce Gunnison Sage Grouse to the area. Overall, our collaborative initiatives with the State have generated successful habitat and wildlife efforts that rival those of our national parks and wildlife areas.

My fear is that our community and this part of the San Luis Valley could change, and change forever, if a transmission line is pushed through the heart of the Ranch and across all of northern Costilla County. We don't know what the impact of this change would be unless all of the impacts on our community are fully studied. My understanding of the law is that a full study of all impacts needs to be done before a project like this can proceed. My concern, and I believe I share this concern with many in our community, is that the utilities already seem to have a very fixed plan for what they want to build without a full study of impacts and without an examination of other possible alternatives having been done.

B-008-005

B-008-003: Wildlife (In Review)

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted. Potential impacts to wildlife from the proposed project and mitigation measures will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in late 2010 and will be available at

<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

B-008-004: Water Resources (In Review)

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted. Potential impacts to water resources from the proposed project and mitigation measures will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in late 2010 and will be available at

<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

B-008-005: NEPA Process (In Review)

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted. Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. has requested financial assistance from the USDA Rural Utilities Service (RUS), for their anticipated ownership interest in the proposed San Luis Valley – Calumet - Comanche Transmission Project. RUS has determined that funding Tri-State's ownership interest is a federal action requiring analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

RUS is the lead federal agency for NEPA, and will consult with other federal, state, and local agencies, and affiliated tribes as well as adhere to applicable regulations.

Additional information regarding the NEPA process can be found on the RUS project website at <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/environ.htm>.

The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in

B-008-006

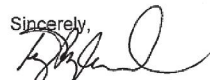
I have spent most of my life on the Trinchera Ranch. My father, Errol, came to Trinchera Ranch as Ranch Manager in 1969 when I was eight years old. I took over as Ranch Manager in 1990. After living nearly forty years on Trinchera Ranch, I am incredibly saddened to think that everything this Ranch and its employees have done for the local community and the State of Colorado could be overlooked by a hurried and flawed decision-making process. If the utilities' preferred alternative is chosen, our wildlife, which we help manage for the State of Colorado and rely on as a source of income, will see their habitat and natural corridors cut down the middle. We do not yet know all of the exact repercussions of creating a dividing line down natural wildlife corridors. Yet, we do know that this project could have long-standing impacts that will affect Trinchera Ranch, our employees and how we conduct business for years to come.

B-008-007

At the end of the day, I am a San Luis Valley resident who wants the best for his community, particularly concerning the precious gift of power because some areas of the Valley did not have reliable power until the 1980s. This means that I favor bringing more reliable power to the Valley. However, this must be done right, in a way that solicits open communication with those affected by the proposed project and in a way that protects the area's heritage and natural resources.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments and for understanding the seriousness of the issues for this community.

Sincerely,



Ty Ryland
Trinchera Ranch, Manager

late 2010 and will be available at
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

B-008-006: Wildlife (In Review)

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted. Potential impacts to wildlife from the proposed project and mitigation measures will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement.

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<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.

B-008-007: Socioeconomic Resources (In Review)

Your email/letter/comment form has been received and your comment noted. Potential impacts to social and economic resources from the proposed project and mitigation measures will be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Environmental Impact Statement is anticipated to be completed in late 2010 and will be available at
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/ea.htm>.